

When Single Immersion Began

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The average American, when he first hears of trine immersion, wonders, "When did that fad begin?" But the church historian searches, not for the origin of trine immersion, but for the origin of single immersion. Trine immersion was the original; when and how did single immersion begin to take its place as a substitute?

Sozomen, the church historian, who died A. D. 450, says, "Some say that Eunomius was the first who dared to bring forward the notion that the divine baptism ought to be administered by a single immersion, and to corrupt the tradition which has been handed down from the apostles, and which is still observed by all. . . . But whether it was Eunomius, or any other person, who first introduced heretical opinions concerning baptism, . . . it must be admitted that they introduced a practice to which they had not themselves submitted and thus undertook to administer to others what had never been administered to themselves."

Theodoret (A.D. 393-457), bishop of Cyrus, says, with reference to the heretic Eunomius, "He subverted the law of holy baptism, which had been handed down from the beginning from the Lord and the apostles, and made a contrary law, asserting that it is not necessary to immerse the candidate for baptism thrice, nor to mention the names of the Trinity, but to baptize once only into the death of Christ."

Pope Pelagius, who died A.D. 560, says, "There are many who say that they baptize in the name of Christ alone and by a single immersion. But the gospel command, which was given by God Himself and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, reminds us that we should administer holy baptism to every one in the name of the Trinity and by trine immersion, for our Lord said to his disciples, 'Go baptize all nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.'"

Single immersion began, not with Jesus, nor with the apostles, nor in the first century, nor the second or third centuries, but in the latter half of the fourth century. It began with a heretic who could not tolerate a mode of baptism that honored the Trinity because he did not believe in the deity of our Lord. Eunomius and his teachings were formally condemned by the council of Constantinople in A.D. 381.